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GURU GOBIND SINGH

by

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and prosperous life.

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GURU GOBIND SINGH

1. LIFE

1.1

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Nanak and the last prophet of the Sikhs was born on Saturday, 22 December, 1666, at Patna in Bihar. His father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, had left the Punjab in 1665 with his entire family for a tour of East when Guru Gobind Singh was conceived at Allahabad. Guru Gobind Singh was the only son of his parents.

Like the three wise men who saw a Star in Jeruslam, at the birth of Jesus, a Muslim saint Pir Bhikan Shah saw a bright Star in Patna at the birth of Guru Gobind Singh. Soon after the saint set off for Patna to pay homage to the Divine child.

1.2

The childhood name of the Guru was Gobind Rai. He became Guru in the young age of 9 when his father was tortured to death by the ruling Mughals. From the age of 9 to 42 when he breathed his last his life had been occupied fighting the Moghuls against injustice and tyranny.

Gobind Rai had his earlier education at the local school in Anandpur. Later he became scholar in Persian, Sanskrit, Braj and Arabic languages. He also became an exponent of the religious books of the Hindus, Muslims and Budhists. He also learnt archery, shooting and horse riding and is known as the best army general of his times.

Gobind Rai got married at the age of 16. He had four sons.

Most of his life he lived at Anandpur in Punjab. Few years he lived at Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pradesh. He died at Nanded in the South in 1708 A.D.

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2. MISSION

2.1 DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY

In order to get a right perspective of the Mission of Guru Gobind Singh, it must be remembered that Guru Gobind Singh was:

- A. an heir to a religious throne*
- B. ordained by God to uproot evil and administer justice and*
- C. to declare the Mission of Guru Nanak fulfilled.*

The Guru was confronted with a difficult and complex task of upholding a faith which had been created by Guru Nanak and nursed by his successors. He had succeeded to that religious and spiritual office which involved innumerable responsibilities, far-sightedness, dynamism, courage, fearlessness and boldness. He had accepted this role with great enthusiasm and challenge. He was a man of destiny in his own words. The Guru affirmed,

“The Lord sent me for righteous sake,
On this account I have come into the world,
To extend the faith everywhere and,
To seize and destroy the evil and the sinful.
Understand this, all holy men in your hearts,
I assumed birth for the purpose of spreading the faith,
For saving the saints and for extirpating all tyrants.”¹

His prime Mission was to formalise the concept and structure of the ideal man as put forward by Guru Nanak and by the other 8 Sikh Gurus.

The concept of the ideal man as established by the first nine Gurus was, in a way, extended, chiselled and polished by Guru Gobind Singh through the Creation of the Khalsa. It was certainly not a departure from the fundamental Mission as presented by the first nine Gurus. The extension was an evolution and not a revolution.

2.2 THE IDEAL MAN

The Ideal Man of Guru Gobind Singh was an embodiment of the greatest virtues - Truth, Justice, Compassion coupled with Valour and Fearlessness.

He named the Ideal Man as Khalsa. The new method of baptism to enter the Brotherhood of Khalsa, the Commandments which the Khalsa must follow and the Code of Conduct of the Khalsa, all these

were demonstrated and presented to the Sikhs on 30th March 1699 at Kesgarh in Anandpur in the presence of more than 50 thousand people. On that day more than 20 thousand people were baptised and entered the Forum of Khalsa.

The Khalsa as formulated by the tenth Guru was a group of saints plus soldiers. An army of a very high moral character. Thus along with the spiritual teachings and saintly lifestyle of the house of Guru Nanak, the tenth Nanak infused in the followers of the house a new spirit of self-sacrifice, fearlessness, bravery, boldness, truthfulness, benevolence, brotherliness and graciousness. According to the Guru, these were to be the requisite attributes of the Khalsa. The Khalsa was to be a tough saint. His identity with the Khalsa was to the point of asserting that:

*"Khalsa is my true Guru
Khalsa is my perfect teacher." 2*

His respect for the Khalsa is nowhere better seen than in one of his compositions:

*"All the battles I have won against tyranny,
I have fought with the devoted backing of these people .
I was born to serve the Khalsa, through whom I attained
eminence.
What would I have been without their kind and ready
help?
There are millions of insignificant people like me . ." °3*

To the Khalsa his basic command was to worship One formless and deathless God. He forbade the worship of idols and human beings. To prevent his own worship by his followers he warned them:

*"... Those who call me Supreme God shall fall into the pit
of hell
Know me as his slave only and have not the least doubt
of that,
I am the slave of the Supreme Being, and have come to
behold the spectacle of the world,
What the Lord told me, I tell the world and I will not remain
silent through the fear of mortals." °4*

2.3 THE CREATION OF THE KHALSA

To create the Khalsa Brotherhood and to announce the completion of the Mission of Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh

appeared before a huge gathering of the Sikhs at Kesgarh (Anandpur) on 30th March 1699 A.D. The Sikhs had been ordered to come to Kesgarh with their hair and beards unshaven. In front of this huge gathering, in a very firm and commanding voice and raising his sword aloft, the Guru stood up and asked whether there was any amongst the gathering who was ready to lay down his life for Dharam (faith/truth). It was an unusual and unprecedented call. By it the Guru did not mean his disciples to come forward and offer their lives for him, for that they had already done in hundreds and thousands. A number of battles had been fought, first during the times of Guru Hargobind and then in Guru Gobind Singh's own times wherein very many followers were slain to save Dharam and the faith of Guru Nanak. In almost all these battles both, Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh had exerted a powerful influence on their followers. By leading almost all the battles and fighting side by side with their followers both Gurus had won their utmost confidence, loyalty and devotion much before the creation of the Khalsa. Thus the present call was of a very different kind. It was absolutely impersonal in nature. Sacrificing oneself for an ideology was certainly unique in its character. The objective before the Guru was to create a Brotherhood which would ever be ready to stand against evil and tyranny in every shape and form and who could sacrifice themselves only to God. Thus, when the Guru asked for "Heads" (sacrifices), it was an impersonal demand, as impersonal as the sword (power-an attribute of Guru Gobind Singh's concept of God) was or as Dharma was. The surrender of lives to the sword symbolised complete effacement of self in the service of God.

Few moments after the call, one after the other, five Sikhs stood up and offered their lives for the Dharma. They included: Bhai Daya Ram, a Khatri (businessman) of Lahore, aged about 30 years, who in the last days of the Guru took the Guru's historic letter, known in the Indian history as Zafarnama, to Aurangzeb, the emperor of India, and lived with the Guru at Nanded till the Guru's death; Bhai Dharam Singh, a Jat (agriculturist) from Delhi, aged 33 years, who later became the Commander of the Guru's Army and also remained with the Guru till his death; Bhai Mohkam Chand, a washerman of Dwarka (Gujrat), aged 36, who later died fighting heroically at Chamkaur; Bhai Sahib Chand, a barber from Bider, aged 37 years, who also died fighting bravely at Chamkaur; and Bhai Himmat Rai, a water-carrier from Jagannath (Orissa), aged 39 years, who also died fighting fearlessly at Chamkaur.

After the unconditional surrender to the Guru, the five heroes

were taken into a tent, robed in new shining yellow uniforms, garlanded and brought back into the assembly, to the surprise of all, who had thought that the five were killed by the Guru. They were then administered the new baptism of double-edged dagger. The Guru hugged all of them and called them as his Beloved Ones (Panj Piyares). Individually, each one was called a Singh (lion) and collectively they were given the name of Khalsa, into which the Guru himself begged to be included and was baptised and initiated as the sixth. During the first few days of the month of April 1699 A.D. some eighty thousand men received the new baptism to join the order of the Khalsa.

Thus was created the Brotherhood of Khalsa. Just as the Guru was the chosen prophet of God, deputed to punish the wicked and vicious people, so the Khalsa was to act as the Guru's proxy to carry on the Mission of the Guru for ever.

3. TEACHINGS

For the guidance of the followers of the house of Nanak the Guru prescribed a Text of Principles compiled by himself. The Text contained a Code of Five Commandments, each governed by five rules.

3.1 FIVE BELIEFS

3.1.1 BELIEF IN ONE GOD:

The fundamental belief of Guru Gobind Singh, like all other Sikh Gurus, was based on the philosophy of idealism - that there is only One Reality, One God and that all that exists arose from the function of that One Reality and must eventually merge into that One Reality. God is everywhere and is ever existent. He is the sole source of existence. As a spark cannot exist without fire, similarly soul cannot exist without Him, the Creator of endless flow of individual souls. He is both matter and spirit. In the Guru's own words:

"He is the absolute One, the invincible and the imperishable Lord. His light manifests itself in many worlds."

"Some live in water, some on land and some fly in the skies;

God made them and He will destroy them too.

As light blends with darkness and darkness with light,
So all things have sprung from Him and shall unite in Him."

3.1.2 BELIEF IN THE GURU:

Guru Gobind Singh, like his predecessors, laid great stress on the need of a Teacher-Guru to help in the communication with God, and warned not to give, under any circumstances, the position of God to the Teacher-Guru.

He himself stated in unequivocal terms:

“ . . . Whosoever regards me as Lord,
Shall be dammed and destroyed.”

In the Sikh Scriptures, the word “Guru” has been used in at least three senses. Firstly, it has been used for God Himself. Secondly, it has been referred to as Teacher-Guru and thirdly, the Guru is referred as word of God-The Nam.

Guru Gobind Singh proclaimed:

“I will pay no regard to any one but God,
what God told me I will do,
I will worship only His Nam, who is our Protector from
evil
I will meditate on the Nam of the Immortal One,
And obtain the Supreme Light”

3.1.3 BELIEF IN GURU GRANTH SAHIB:

On 6th October, 1708 A.D., Guru Gobind Singh assembled his followers at Nanded and told them that the line of Teacher-Guru was to end with him and the Sikhs were, thereafter, to look upon the Granth (Guru Granth Sahib) as the symbol of Nam. In his last farewell message, the Guru told the Khalsa:

“I have entrusted you to the Immortal God . . . I have infused my mental and bodily spirit into the Granth Sahib and Khalsa should henceforth obey the Granth Sahib. It is the visible body of the Guru.”

3.1.4. BELIEF IN FREEDOM:

Freedom refers to a state of being free. Broadly it includes freedom of action, freedom of thought and expression, freedom of religion and freedom of way of living. The Khalsa was commanded to believe in total freedom. Freedom in this context meant doing good to oneself and for others, avoiding evil at any cost, living in peace and letting others live in peace, obeying the just command of the Government in power and rising against all injustices and tyranny. The

Guru's teaching emphasised that religion should preach tolerance and love, not hatred and violence. People should be free to choose their own religion and way of life. Here on the one hand, Guru Gobind Singh preached discipline and respect for law, on the other hand, he taught resistance and war against oppression and despotism. Commenting on this point, the Guru wrote to emperor Aurangzeb:

"Your Commanders, who had taken the oath (not to disturb us), attacked us from the back without a moment's notice with arrows, bullets and swords . . .

"In this desperate situation I was left with no other alternative except to jump into the battle and face the onslaught I too, was compelled to take up the sword and fight when all other possible remedies fail, it is but lawful to resort to the sword . . ."

3.1.5 DEMOCRACY

The unique community of fearless saint-soldiers, the Khalsa Brotherhood, was established and administered by Guru Gobind Singh on the basis of a staunch belief of democracy. Guru Gobind Singh was the first Indian leader who taught democratic principles and made his followers regard each other as 'Bhai' (brothers) and act by

Gurmata (majority vote). The Guru had stipulated that the future heir to human civilisation was not the genotype, a racial group; not the phenotype, the votary of a language for the elect; not the behaviour type, the traditionalist, but the democratic type, one who believes and follows up values meaningfully manifest in the conscience of mankind. He founded the Khalsa Brotherhood with these ideas in mind, and was thus surely a true forerunner of modern socialism.

3.2 FIVE SYMBOLS

The Sikh Forms (symbols) were not conceived in a spirit of exclusiveness, or as essential to the spiritual advancement of individual souls. They were simply intended to serve as aids to the preservation of the corporate life of the community, and any man who likes to serve humanity through the Sikh Panth can wear them.

The Sikh history stands witness to the fact that these Symbols have effectively helped the Sikhs to live and die together and to keep their ideals unsullied even in the times of the greatest trial. Undoubtedly, the Symbols are very important as an indication of the type and personality of an individual. They constantly remind the

wearer not to do anything against the erosion of his faith and plighted word. It is as ridiculous to wear them without practising the virtues they represent as dressing as ass in a lion's skin. Without a good life and excellent moral character, these symbols have little meaning. Therefore, the devotee's life should show in practical living the great qualities which the symbols stressed. The symbols are five in number:

3.2.1. - UNCUT HAIR:

The hair of a Sikh is a symbol of his vow to live for the love of God, a vow to seek immortality through contemplation and action, a vow to dedicate mind, body and soul at the altar of truth, justice, freedom, for which the Gurus lived and died.

3.2.2. - STEEL BRACELET:

A bracelet is a round object without a beginning and without an end. It is symbolic of faith, without which religious life is inconceivable. It reminds that a Sikh must lead a life, guided and supported by faith in God.

3.2.3 - THE DRAWERS

The underwear, to a Sikh, suggests that a Sikh must play the role of a saint and soldier in social and political life. He is a religious man ready to perform all secular duties. Holiness for him is to be expressed in action and restraint, more in smart and sobre dress than in cynical other-worldiness.

3.2.4 - THE COMB

The comb is needed to keep the hair clean. It signifies that the long hair of the Sikh must always be kept clean and tidy. Matted hair and dishevelled hair is not permitted as it is a sign of lethargy and uncleanness.

3.2.5. - THE SWORD

In all societies the sword has been an emblem of dignity, power and self respect. Guru Gobind Singh made it a symbol of Khalsa as it was needed for self defence and for the protection of the weak and the oppressed. The Guru commanded the Sikhs to revere the sword and to use it in good cause only.

3.3 - FIVE VOWS

The Khalsa Brotherhood had also embodied the acceptance of certain vows - negative imperatives; a solemn duty not to commit any

of the following heinous sins:

3.3.1. *Vow not to remove body hair*

3.3.2 *Vow not to eat kosher meat*

3.3.3 *Vow not to smoke*

3.3.4 *Vow not to worship tombs, graves and
relics of cremation and cherish superstitions*

3.3.5 *Vow not to indulge in adultery*

3.4. - FIVE DELIVERANCES:

For the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh recommended five deliverances:

3.4.1. JANAM NASH - (deliverance from the shams of caste system)

In the Khalsa Brotherhood all Hindu castes are blended on a democratic basis as all are regarded equal. Though there had been numerous reforms in ancient times who tried to remove the evils of caste system from the Indian soil, each time the disease had outstripped the remedies. But for Guru Gobind Singh it can be said that he has no parallel in the Indian history to the way in which he elevated the low castes. He exalted them by placing the real power in their hands. Under him they wielded the sword and acquired the dignity that goes with the office of Army-men.

3.4.2 - SHARAM NASH (the deliverance from hereditary professions):

Guru Gobind Singh's new baptism ceremony brought about an immediate and absolute break with the past. It gave the Khalsa new hope and emancipation from the hereditary professional restrictions.

3.4.3 - DHARAM NASH (deliverance from previous religious practices and traditions):

The Khalsa Brotherhood was the bridge the Guru constructed across the gulf of hate and misunderstanding among the different warring creeds. It brought about harmony, peace, and reconciliation in place of strife, enmity and animosity. It taught true religion and true religious practices in place of useless rituals and meaningless customs.

3.4.4. - KARAM NASH (deliverance from the past deeds):

According to Guru Gobind Singh, the past deeds can be pardoned by God's grace and the sinners can be absolved of their sins.

3.4.5 - BHARAM NASH (the deliverance from all the superstitions, taboos, rituals and austerities):

The Khalsa is not to believe in any rituals. The belief and worship of God does not require the observance of any rituals. The Guru deplored any sort of religious hypocrisy.

3.5. - RULES OF CONDUCT

The Khalsa is to practice the following Rules of Conduct:

3.5.1. - *Life of honesty*

3.5.2. - *Life of truth*

3.5.3. - *Life of restraint*

3.5.4. - *Life of a householder*

3.5.5. - *Life of religion*

4. TRAVELLS

Unlike other world Prophets Guru Gobind Singh travelled widely. He was born in Bihar (East of India). Lived most of his life in Punjab (North of India) and passed away at Nanded (South of India). A large number of places in the States of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra are directly connected with him. Four out of five Takhats of the Sikh nation are connected with Guru Gobind Singh. Takhat Patna Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh was born; Takhat Kesgarh Sahib, where he baptised the Khalsa, Takhat Damdama Sahib, where he compiled the final version of Guru Granth Sahib and Takhat Hazoor Sahib, where he breathed his last.

5. - BATTLES

Guru Gobind Singh fought about twenty battles in his life of 42 years. Nine of these battles were fought before the Creation of the Khalsa and eleven after its Creation. All these battles were fought for survival as the Mughal rulers of India and the kings of small Hill States had sworn to crush the Guru and annihilate the Khalsa Brotherhood.

According to the Sikh thought it is the union of meditation and power which can sustain the world. Complete renunciation and

extreme power were both rejected by Guru Gobind Singh. He had created a saint who could wield the sword against injustice and tyranny. For a saint to wield a sword is not new to the history of world religions. In Hindu religion, both Rama and Krishan were Kashatriyas and in their own times played the part of war heroes to save good from evil. Judaism and Islam, from its very inception, were nursed under the shadow of the sword. Moses the Prophet of the Jews and Mohammed the Prophet of the Muslims had to fight a number of battles in their life times for survival and for the spread of their faith. Christian kings, too had to resort to sword for the survival of their religion and for its spread in the West and the East.

The concept of the saint-soldier, in the Sikh thought, envisages that Bhakti (saintliness) without shakti (power or strength) becomes pitiable and debilitated and fails to survive for long. It becomes too weak and too vulnerable. On the other hand shakti without bhakti breeds fascism and authoritarianism. Thus an ideal situation is of a saint-soldier.

6. - PERSONALITY:

Guru Gobind Singh was a unique personality of his times. He was a Prophet, a saint, a poet and a military general and in every role he was par excellence. His personality can be summed up as:

6.1 - APOSTLE OF HUMAN UNITY AND BROTHERHOOD:

At a time when, because of religious differences, hatred and intolerance the Indian society was torn between low caste and high caste between kafirs (infidels) and melach (Muslims), Guru Gobind Singh raised his voice against all this and said:

“The temple and mosque are the same; the Hindu worship and the Muslim prayers are the same;

All men are the same; it is through error that they seem different . . .

Allah and Abekh are the same; the Purans and Quran are the same:

They are all alike: it is the one God who created them all.

6.2 - A PROPHET:

He was a Prophet. His teachings equal, and in many respects surpass, many world Prophets. Unlike many of them he did not claim himself to be God. Like Jesus he claimed himself to be God's son and like Prophet Mohammed he referred himself to be His servant.

He said:

“ . . . Regard me as His slave;
And have no doubt whatever of this;
I am servant of the Supreme Being,
And have come to behold the drama of this world.”

6.3. - SOCIAL REFORMER

He was a great social reformer. He abolished social distinctions and gave practical effect to the doctrine that ‘the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes’. He fused all the four castes in one Brotherhood, the Khalsa.

6.4 - STATESMAN:

He was an unparalleled statesman and administrator. His rule was based on love and justice and his policies were based on truth and morality. He was a strict disciplinarian.

6.5 - HOUSEHOLDER:

Like other Sikh Gurus, Guru Gobind Singh was also a householder. He was a obedient son, a considerate father and a loving husband. Family life is one of the pyramids of the Sikh faith. Celibacy and renunciation have been rejected by the Sikh Gurus.

6.6 - PATRIOT

Guru Gobind Singh was a true patriot. He was filled with unbounded grief at the abject slavery to which his countrymen had been degraded. He sacrificed his whole family. His father, his mother, his four sons and everything else he owned or belonged to him at the altar of freedom of his people. He was indeed the greatest soul ever born in this world.

6.7 KARAM YOGI

Guru Gobind Singh was an ideal of every one. He was a perfect example of an exemplary Karam Yogi. Service of humanity and the service of God was his moto. Bowing in front of the five Beloved-Ones whom he himself had baptised was a startling example of his greatness. When he was ambushed at the fortress of Chamkaur, he surrendered before the Command of the five Sikhs and left the fortress in the dark of the night.

He was a lawgiver in the pulpit, champion in the field, a king on the masand, and a fakir in the society of the Khalsa.

When the time for his final departure came, he told his followers not to mourn for him and he gave them his last instructions:

"I have entrusted you to the immortal God. Ever remain under his protection and trust no-one besides. Wherever there are five Sikhs assembled who abide by the Guru's teachings, know that I am in the midst of them. He who serves them shall win his reward - the fulfilment of his heart's desires. Read the history of your Gurus from the time of Guru Nanak. Henceforward, the Guru shall be the Khalsa and the Khalsa the Guru. I have infused my mental and bodily spirit into the Granth Sahib and the Khalsa." 8

Thus it can be said that the Guru always lives in the Granth Sahib and the Khalsa. The Sikhs firmly and wholeheartedly believe in this, their unique heritage. They have undergone periods of great prosperity and adversity but they have always survived to make the spirit of the ideal man, Guru Gobind Singh, manifest in all that they do and say. May Wahiguru always bless their endeavours.

U.G.C. Research Project
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Footnotes

Acknowledgements are due to the following for the quotations used:

1. *Bachittar Natak* of Guru Gobind Singh translated by M.A. Macauliffe. "The Sikh Religion" Vol. 5 Page 294.
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3. Ibid.
4. *Thirty-Three Swaiyas* of Guru Gobind Singh translated by Macauliffe, Vol. 5 Page 321.
5. *Akal Ustat* 15, 85. Guru Gobind Singh, translated by Macauliffe, Vol. 5 Page 275.
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7. *Zafarnama*, Verse 22, Guru Gobind Singh. Translated by G.S. Bedi in "The Epistle of Victory".
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WHAT IS SIKHISM?

The word "*Sikh*" means a "*disciple*". A Sikh is a person who believes in One God, and follows physically, spiritually and intellectually the teachings of the Gurus, enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh Holy Book, also treats *Guru Granth Sahib* as his living Guru (spiritual and intellectual circle). He or she must take Amrit, the Sikh Baptism.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak, who was born in 1469 AD, in the village Talwandi, now called "NANKANA SAHIB", near Lahore (Pakistan).

Right from his childhood his keen mind would not accept all the groundless rituals, superstitions and dogmas which passed for religion in those days.

Guru Nanak and the nine Gurus who succeeded him, set a wonderful example of living spiritually, while yet taking an active and secular part in the world.

The Tenth and the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666 - 1708 AD) finalized the Sikh Baptism ceremony in 1699 AD, and thus gave a distinctive identity to the Sikhs. The first Five Baptised Sikhs were named *Panj Payare* (Five Beloved Ones), who in turn baptised the Guru on his request — an event hitherto unknown in the history of mankind.

Shortly before passing away the Guru ordained that *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh Holy Scripture would be the ultimate spiritual authority for the Sikhs and the temporal authority would vest in the *Khalsa Panth* — The Sikh Commonwealth. *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh Holy Scripture was compiled and edited by the Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan in 1604 AD. This is the only scripture in the world which has been compiled by the founders of a faith during their own life time.

Guru Arjan also built the world famous Gurdwara — *Darbar Sahib*, at Amritsar which is the nucleus of Sikhism.

During the eighteenth century the Sikhs were subjected to various suppressions and persecutions by the authorities of the time motivated by communal fanaticism. They had to make supreme sacrifices to protect and preserve their faith and separate entity.

The Mughal Empire was on the verge of disintegration. The Afghans had started invading the country under Ahmed Shah Abdali. The Sikhs availed of this opportunity to establish their own kingdom which they ultimately achieved under Maharajah Ranjit Singh (1780-1839 AD). The Sikh Empire lasted for half a century and was annexed by the English in 1849 AD.

During the freedom struggle of India a large number of Sikhs kissed the hangman's noose, faced all the brutalities and braved the bullets and suffered long term imprisonments in order to liberate the country.

Although the Sikhs constitute only 1.7 percent of India's population, yet they have made a name for themselves in almost all walks of life such as armed forces, agriculture, sports, industry, education, medicine and engineering etc., through sheer dint of hard work and with a missionary dedication.

Their adventurist and enterprising nature has taken them to almost all countries of the world.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

The Sikh religion is strictly monotheistic, believing in One Supreme God. Absolute yet All-pervading, the Eternal, the Creator, the Cause of Causes, without enmity, without hate, both Immanent in His creation and beyond it. It is no longer the God of one nation, but the GOD OF GRACE. That being so, He creates man not to punish him for his sins, but for the realisation of his true purpose in the cosmos and to merge in from where he issued forth.

*"O my mind, thou art the embodiment of Light;
know thy Essence"*

*"O my mind, the Lord is ever with thee; through the Guru's Word
enjoy His Love".*

*"Knowing thy essence thou knowest thy Lord;
and knowest thou the mystery of birth and death".*

(Guru Granth, p. 441)

The basic postulate of Sikhism is that life is not sinful in its origin, but having emanated from a Pure Source, the True One abides in it. Thus sayeth Nanak:

*"O my mind, thou art the spark of the Supreme Light; know thy
essence".*

Not only the whole of Sikh Philosophy, but the whole of Sikh history and character, flows from "this principle".

The Sikhs do not recognise the caste system nor do they believe in Idol-worship, rituals, or superstitions. The gods and goddesses are considered as nonentities.

This religion consists of practical living, in rendering service to humanity and engendering tolerance and brotherly love towards all. The Sikh Gurus did not advocate retirement from the world in order to attain salvation. It can be achieved by anyone who earns an honest living and leads a normal life.

"He alone, O Nanak, knoweth the Way, who earneth with the sweat of his brow, and then shareth it with the others".

(Guru Granth, p. 1245)

Guru Nanak gave new hope to the down-trodden mankind to join his fraternity as equals. He is a creator of the NEW MAN in the New World supported by a New morality.

Riches and personal possessions are not hinderance in living by spiritual ideals. Sikhism does not believe in the maxim, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eyes of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God". On the other hand the Sikh dictum is as under:

"They, who are attuned to the Lord, by the Guru's Grace. Attain to the Lord in the midst of Maya, (i.e. Wealth)".

(Guru Granth, p. 921)

Sikhism does not accept the ideology of pessimism. It advocates optimism and hope. The maxim, "Resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also", does not find any place in Sikh way of life. On the other hand it enjoins its followers:

"When an affair is past every other remedy, it is righteous, indeed, to unsheath the sword".

(Guru Gobind Singh)

DISTINCTIVE PERSONALITY

A Sikh has a distinctive personality. This distinction is represented by five symbols, popularly known as Five K's, because the first letter of each symbol begins with the letter "K". These are *Keshas* (long and unshorn hair) *Kangha* (a comb), *Kara* (a steel bracelet), *Kachha* (pair of shorts) and *Kirpan* (a sword).

People who wear a uniform and who are imbued with disciplined outlook, are better able to achieve unity of purpose and acquire a real sense of brotherhood than those who have set no particular standards. A Sikh without these symbols is a nonentity.

Those who cut their hair or trim their beard commit a breach of the Cardinal Rules of the Order, and are considered as “apostates”.

SIKH BAPTISM

“*Amrit*” (The Sikh Baptism) is a must for every Sikh. No minimum or maximum age is stipulated for getting baptised. A Sikh undertakes to uphold the principles of its faith and Code of Conduct as prescribed by the Gurus.

Any man or woman of any nationality, race or social standing, who adheres to the principles of the Faith has a right to receive baptism and join the Sikh Commonwealth – “*The Khalsa Panth*”.

SIKH CODE OF CONDUCT

The Sikh Code of Conduct is known as “*Sikh Rehat Maryada*”. It is based upon the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh traditions and conventions. These rules are meant for carrying out the religious ceremonies and enforcing the discipline of the Faith in a uniform manner throughout the world. No individual or organisation, whosoever important it may be, has a right either to amend these rules or to frame new ones. This power rests with *the Panth* i.e. the community as a whole acting through their Beloved Five (*Panj Payare*). Any rule which over-rides the basic teachings of the Faith is ultra vires.

All intoxications such as alcohol, tobacco and all its derivations; Trimming of the Keshas, Eating meat (Kutha) prepared as per Muslim rites are forbidden.

Adultery is considered as a sin. A Sikh should regard another man's wife as his sister or mother; and another man's daughter as his own daughter. The same rule is applicable to the Sikh woman also.

WOMAN IN THE SIKH SOCIETY

The birth of a girl was unfortunate and custom of *Sati* was prevailing vigorously in the Hindu society at that time.

Woman is regarded as a significant part of the Sikh community. She receives the utmost reverence for her role in the family and society. The birth of a daughter is not considered inauspicious nor does there

exist any custom like Sati – the burning of wife on the funeral pyre of her husband. Rather a widow has a right to remarry if she so desires.

A woman is considered to have the same soul as man and she has an equal right to grow spiritually and to attend religious congregations and recite divine hymns in the Sikh Church. She is also eligible to participate and perform all ceremonies including Baptism.

Sikh women do not put on *Veil (Purdah)*, Dowry and divorce are not permitted. Wearing of clothes which expose the body and breed lustful thoughts are considered dishonourable.

CEREMONIES OF THE SIKHS

The important ceremonies among the Sikhs are those associated with Birth, Naming the child, “*Amrit*” (Baptism), “*Anand Karaj*” (marriage and the death ceremony). The most important among all these is the *Amrit* (Sikh Baptism) ceremony.

No special rituals are attached to these ceremonies, the only important aspect is recitation of Shabad (hymns) from *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The dead amongst the Sikhs are cremated and their ashes are thrown into the nearest canal or river. It is forbidden to erect monuments over the remains of the dead.

All these ceremonies have a common objective, namely to remind us of one’s relation with God. These are conceived as means to an end i.e. the union of soul with the Lord.

MARRIAGE IN SIKHISM

Marital band according to Sikh religion is a sacrament – a body union and not a contract.

“They are not wife and husband who only sit together. Rather are they wife and husband who have one spirit in them”.

(Guru Granth, p. 788)

Sikhism does not believe in celibacy. Married and family life is considered honourable, natural and ideal.

*“O my mind, keep thyself detached even in the household.
If thou practisest the Truth, and holdest thy desire and, doest good Deeds,
thy mind is Illumined by the Guru’s Grace”.*

(Guru Granth, p. 26)

The marriage of Sikh couple is solemnised by circumambulating four times around the "*Guru Granth Sahib*". Each time a Shabad – Epithalamium, which is a part of the marriage service is recited by a Sikh priest who performs the marriage ceremony. The priest tells them to mould their conjugal relations as per the model laid down in these Four Shabads (Hymns).

The same ceremony is performed at the remarriage of a widow or a widower.

FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

The Sikhs celebrate the following days:

The birth and death anniversaries of the Ten Gurus.

The installation of the Holy Granth as the Spiritual Guide (Guru) of the Sikhs.

The birth of the Khalsa i.e. Baisakhi Day which generally falls on the 13th of April each year.

Martyrdom days of the prominent Sikhs who died for the sake of their religion or in defence of the oppressed.

The days connected with the important events of the Sikh history.

THE DAILY LIFE OF A SIKH

Every Sikh is expected to get up in the morning before dawn. After taking bath he should meditate on the Name of God.

"Rise thou early and meditate on the Name, Yea, dwell on the Lord night and day;

Then, thou sufferest not sorrow; and all thy woes depart".

(Guru Granth, p. 225)

The following five compositions are recited every day:

Morning: *Japji Sahib, Jaap Sahib and Ten Swiyyas, Chaupae, Anand Sahib.*

Evening: *Rehras*

Night: (before going to bed) – *Sohila*

A Sikh is required to attend Gurdwara – the Sikh Church – as a part of daily routine.

SANGAT AND PANGAT

The two important features of a Gurdwara are "*Sangat*" – congregation, and "*Pangat*" – Community Kitchen, also known as "*Guru-*

Ka-Langar". This community kitchen is meant for providing food to all devotees, pilgrims and visitors. It is a symbol of equality, fraternity and brotherhood. It is here that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the kings and the paupers, all share the same food sitting together in one row. This kitchen is run by the common contributions of the Sikhs. The institutions of "*Langar*" (Common Kitchen) is instrumental in creating social equality among the whole mankind.

THE GURDWARA

The Sikh Church is called "*Gurdwara*". In every Gurdwara, the *Sikh Holy Scripture* is installed in the main hall, which is used for prayer and daily service.

Every person irrespective of caste, creed, colour, culture or nationality can visit it. Before entering the Gurdwara one must take off his shoes and cover his head. On entering the main hall every one approaches the Holy Scripture (Guru Granth Sahib) and bows before it in reverence and takes his place.

Any Sikh male or female may conduct the prayer or perform the services.

Services begin with the singing of hymns with the musical instruments. On special occasions, singing is intercepted with lectures, poems, or other compositions highlighting events with Ardas — the prayer, which invokes God's blessings in granting peace, prosperity and protection to all mankind.

After the prayers, a Shabad-hymn is read from the Holy scripture and then "*Karah Parshad*", a sweet semolina pudding made from flour, sugar and butter is distributed to the congregation.

On each Gurdwara "*Nishan Sahib*" a flag of yellow colour, surmounted with a "*Khanda*" — a doubled edged sword is erected. This symbolises the combination of temporal and spiritual aspect of Sikh life.

Each city or town has Gurdwaras according to their requirements. All of them have the same sanctity. There are some Gurdwaras which in addition to being a place of prayer have also historic importance. The five most important Gurdwaras are known as TAKHATS/thrones or seats of authority. These are Takhat Patna Sahib in Bihar. Takhat Kesgarh Sahib at Anandpur Sahib, and Takhat Damdama Sahib, at Talwandi-Sabo in Punjab, Takhat Hazur Sahib, at Nanded in Maharashtra and Akal Takhat Sahib at Amritsar, which is also the supreme seat of authority. Religious as well as temporal injunctions are

issued from here from time to time for the guidance of the community. These injunctions are known as "*Hukam Namas*" and have the binding force of Sikh Personal Law.

There is no such class as priesthood in Sikhism. However, the one who performs the daily service is called the Granthi. The hymn-singers are called Ragis and the singing of hymns is called *Kirtan* i.e. praise of the Lord.

We conclude this brochure with the following words from our daily prayer.

*"O God, guve us light, give us understanding,
so that we may know what pleaseth Thee,
And may all (the whole mankind),
prosper by thy Grace.*

*Waheguru ji Ka Khalsa
Waheguru ji Ki Fateh".*

**(Hail God's Khalsa, Victory be to God)
(Sikh Salutation)**

Sikhism is a practical religion – a faith of hope and optimism. Its ideals form a large part of the more progressive elements in humanity today. It shows mankind how to lead a worthy and useful life in the world, which elevates it to the status of Universal World Faith.



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